

University of Texas at San Antonio Archives and Special Collections

MS 317. Archives for Research on Women and Gender Oral History Project

Julia Gayden Transcript, June 11, 1997

Tori Beckman-Wilson: This is Tori Beckman-Wilson, it's June eleventh, nineteen ninety-seven and I'm interviewing Julia Gayden, this is her second interview. We're in her home on Gabriel Street in San Antonio Texas. And today I was hoping to talk about what you did when you were a young girl. What did your parents do?

Julia Gayden: At what age?

TBW: Well, start back as far as you can remember.

JG: Oh, I hadn't planned anything, I just wanted to do what you wanted done.

TBW: O.K. What kind of things did you do when you were young, I mean, six, seven eight years old? What kinds of things did you do for fun?

JG: Well, my first train ride, I was four years old.

TBW: Oh, really?

JG: I went to Wharton, Texas. And my mother, her folks had never seen me. And they told her to bring me to see them in Wharton. That wasn't really Wharton, it was Kendalton, Texas. Kendalton and Wharton are close together. Wharton is a little larger town, then Kendalton, but her folk lived in Kendelton, that's the smaller place there.

TBW: The train took you to Wharton?

JG: No. The same train went to Wharton, but we went from Milam to Kendalton.

TBW: And what was that train ride like? What do you remember about it?

JG: Oh, well, it was just, you know, I was four years old and it was my first train ride.

TBW: How long did it take for you to get there?

JG: Oh, it wasn't too far. No, it was from Kendalton to Milam, I guess it was a half a day in those days, because trains didn't travel like they do now.

TBW: What kind of a train was it?

JG: Oh, it was just a passenger train, just like they have now. You know, it wasn't as modern, you know, as they have now. It was old-fashioned with the cooler in the corner, so you could get a drink of water, you know what a cooler is?

TBW: The water coolers with the water on top?

JG: Yeah. Had a water cooler in there, and we had our own little cups that you pull up [demonstrates].

TBW: Oh, the little cups that collapse down flat?

JG: Yeah. We had one of those little cups and we would get a drink of water when we wanted one out of the cooler in the corner.

TBW: It must have been exciting to go on the train.

JG: And that was the train ride. And Wharton was a little town, very small in population. And my auntie that we went to visit had three children, all girls. And, of course, one of the girls I did not see, because she was away in school, but I saw the other two at my auntie's house. And my auntie raised chickens. You know, she lived in a little town and had chickens and she sold these chickens. Well, there was a boxcar on the railroad track where the people, you know in those days they lived in boxcars, some of the folks did. You know what a boxcar is?

TBW: Yeah. And people lived in them, on the railroad track?

JG: Yeah, they lived in the boxcars. She sent some frying sized chickens down to these boxcars for sale to these people, they told her they were going to buy them, I guess. And I went with the girl to carry the chickens. And when we got down there with the chickens, they were Chinamen, who lived in the boxcar. And they had those stiff hats on, and they had a queue, up under the hat, and when they

took their hat off their head, their queue fell down and I thought it was a snake. [laughs] And I took off. And my cousin had to run and catch me. I thought the snake was coming down from under the man's hat. That long braided hair. They braided their hair and put their hats up on their head.

TBW: So if you were four years old, that would have been eighteen ninety-eight?

JG: Well, when I was four years old, and I'm a hundred and two now, you just subtract four from a hundred and two and that would have been ninety-eight years ago. That was one of the experiences that I had on this trip.

TBW: That's a memorable trip, how could you forget that?

JG: A memorable trip, I saw my first Chinaman with a queue on his head. [laughs]

TBW: Were there a lot of people of different backgrounds living in Texas at that time?

JG: No, we didn't have Chinese people up in our vicinity. I only saw the Chinese people when I went down there that lived in the boxcar that my auntie sent the chickens to sell.

TBW: So after you're four years old, did you go to kindergarten? I don't know how the schools worked at that time.

JG: No, I didn't go to school when I was four years old.

TBW: When did you start school?

JG: As near as I can remember, I guess I started school when I was about six years old. I didn't go to any school until after my mother passed away, and my mother passed away the next year after we made this visit. I was five years old when she passed.

TBW: Do you remember your mother's death?

JG: Well, no, I just faintly remember. It seems like a dream.

TBW: That's probably a good thing for little kids.

JG: Yeah. It just seems like a dream. I don't remember too much about her funeral or nothing like that. I don't know whether they carried me, or didn't carry me or not. But I don't remember the funeral of my mother.

TBW: And did your father remarry soon after that?

JG: Yeah, he remarried about six or eight months after my mother passed away. You see, my mother passed away the next year after we made that trip on this train. See, I was four years old when I had that first train ride, and the next year, she passed away.

TBW: That's very young to lose your mother, that's sad.

JG: And my father had some people renting land from him and farming on sharecroppers. You know what a sharecrop is? Well, they were sharecroppers and he moved one of the, he moved one of these men and his wife up in the house with him to live after my mother passed so that they could take care of me. And so they lived up in the house with us for a year, until he remarried. I don't know whether he remarried in a year, but in a little less than a year, I don't remember the date.

TBW: But it was around, about a year.

JG: About a year.

TBW: How much land did your father own? He must have had a lot of land to have sharecroppers.

JG: He owned over four hundred acres of land. And he only paid a dollar an acre for this land.

TBW: How did he get such a good deal?

JG: Well, that's what land sold for in that vicinity. Everybody bought land for a dollar an acre. That was the price. But it was wooded land, it wasn't cultivated. They had nothing but just trees and woods on it, and when they bought it for this dollar an acre, they had to clear it, they had to cut that wood off, so they could farm it.

TBW: That must have been some hard work.

JG: It was hard work.

TBW: Did he own the land long before you were born, or was that...

JG: Yeah, he owned part of it before I was born, I was born knowing that we lived on this land when I was born. And clearing his land, he had a lot of pecan trees, and when he came to pecan trees, he just left them. And he had about thirty or forty acres with a beautiful orchard of pecans, just pecan trees, and he sold the pecans. Gathered them and sold them. Carried them to town and sold them. And there was different types of pecans, some of them were nice, big pecans, some of them were soft-shelled. And the trees just—knowing how long it takes to make a tree, at that time, when I can remember, some of those trees were a hundred years old. Me knowing how long it takes a tree to get a certain size, in height and circumference, some of them were great big round trees. It would take two people to get your hands to go around them. For a tree to get that size, it had to be a hundred years old.

TBW: Takes a very long time.

JG: It takes trees a long time to grow that large.

TBW: So you're living on this—it must have been very beautiful there. It must have been very pretty.

JG: Oh, yeah. And he cultivated those pecans, he farmed, made cotton, corn and everything, but the trees were there. And he had about forty acres with those pecans.

TBW: Did that bring in some good money? Were they worth good money?

JG: Oh, he didn't get but ten cents a pound for them. That's as much as he ever sold them for, when he lived. He didn't sell them for but ten cents a pound. Gather them, take them to town and sell them for ten cents a pound. Well, some of them he sold even cheaper than ten cents. Because he got ten cents for the great big nice ones.

TBW: Did you ever have to, did you ever help gather the pecans.

JG: Oh, yes. He would pay us ten cents for a water bucket, to pick up the pecans. He would give us ten cents a bucket.

TBW: That sounds like big money to a young girl.

JG: Yeah. And we would make a lot of money, we thought. [laughs] And he would thrash the trees, climb up the trees and thrash them, and we'd pick them up and he'd give us ten cents a bucket to pick them up, his children. Well, anybody. A lot of people would come over and pick them up, you know, for ten cents a bucket.

TBW: So you had a lot of help, then. Now, how many sharecroppers lived on the land?

JG: That he had? Oh, he always had two or three. Two or three sharecroppers.

TBW: So did they cultivate most of the land, or did he have a big piece of it he worked on himself, or how did that work?

JG: Yeah, I don't know exactly how much each man had, but each man would work, just like I said, thirty or forty acres, I don't know how many acres you know, that each man would work, but he always had as many as three sharecroppers. And he had about six or eight mules, and each sharecropper, he would furnish the mules and the plows and things like that.

TBW: Your father would?

JG: Uh-huh, for the sharecroppers. And they would, half of what they made was his and half of what they made was theirs.

TBW: So, was your family then, middle-class, you'd say? Economically, money-wise?

JG: Oh, yeah, we were considered the better livers. You know, some were poor, real poor, didn't have nothing. But we always had plenty. You know, like people had in those days.

TBW: So do you think you had a good childhood, did you have fun?

JG: Fun, while I was a young girl. When I was a young girl, such a fun as we had, we went on picnics, and they gave what you call suppers. And of course, at the suppers, they would dance. And I'll tell you what they would do. There were some people that would have what is known as a box supper. All the ladies would cook a nice box and have a lunch in this shoe box and they would put numbers on the boxes, four, five, three, four, from one to whatever number of boxes that you had. And

the men would buy the box, they wouldn't know who the box belonged to, but the men would buy the box and you would keep your number. Like, if my box is number four, I put up my box and I'd keep it, and nobody would know what the number was. And when the men went up to buy, he said, "Well, give me number four." And they'd say, "Who's got number four?" And I'd say, "Number four," and we'd sit down and eat the box together. [laughs]

TBW: Oh, O.K. That sounds nice, that sounds like fun.

JG: And that was what they'd give, box suppers. And after the box suppers, they had some people who played the guitar, the fiddle and a banjo, and they'd play and the folks would dance. You know, that old time music.

TBW: Yeah, how often did this, these events happen? A lot? Twice a month? Every week?

JG: No, they didn't happen every week, but it happen everybody every two or three weeks, somebody would give a supper. And sometimes the church would give a supper. You know, they'd have church suppers sometime, the church would give a box supper. And sometimes individual people would give a box supper. And then sometimes they would have a supper and there wouldn't be no boxes, they'd just sell food. People would just go and buy food and they'd dance, things like that.

TBW: That sounds like fun.

JG: That was the amusement. And then they'd have horse races at picnics. They'd have picnics and people who had horses, they would run the horses, horse races at this picnic.

TBW: Did people bet on the horses?

JG: I don't know. I don't remember them betting. They could have been betting, you know, because I didn't know whether they did or whether they didn't.

TBW: Where did they have these horse races? On people's land?

JG: No, they had a little town, Rockdale was the little town and it had something like a park. And they had these horse races at this park.

TBW: How many people would be at these kinds of things? Dinners or races.

JG: Oh, everybody in the community. You know, they didn't have a whole lot of attractions, so when they'd have a picnic, everybody in the community would go to the picnic.

TBW: This was primarily the black community, right? Or everybody?

JG: Oh, it was mixed. It was white and black in the community, but we didn't associate together. You know, the white people would have affairs, and the colored people would have their own affairs, they didn't associate. Because there was segregation. The coloreds had their affairs, and the whites had theirs, but they had practically the same thing that we had. It wasn't any different.

TBW: Another thing that I've been very curious about, I've been thinking a lot about. Do you remember your first ride in a car?

JG: In an automobile? Oh, yes, I remember my first ride in a car. A doctor in a little town, we were about twelve or fifteen miles from, was the first person to have a car. And when somebody would get sick, he would come out in the car. It was just like a buggy. It was made just like a buggy, only it had rubber wheels on it. It had the lights on the outside, you know how a buggy's made, with the lights on the outside, and he had to cross a field to get to the road that came down to our house. All the people had the land fenced in, in those days, and he had to open the gate and come across a white man's field to get to our house. The white man owned the house here [gestures to indicate location] and we owned the farm here, over here. And this doctor had to come across this white man's place to get to our house. And this white man had his field fenced and he had a gate. And when he'd come to our house, when somebody was sick, and when he get ready to go back, he'd take us in the car and let us ride to open the gate. [laughs] And it wouldn't matter. I'd say it about a half a mile, I guess, it might have been more than half a mile, I don't know, but little kids, we'd ride with the doctor. That was our first ride in the car.

TBW: How old were you, about?

JG: Yeah, I was about eight years old. At that time.

TBW: That must have been so exciting. Were you afraid?

JG: Yeah, it was exciting to ride in the car and open the gate. And didn't anybody have a car in that town but the doctor, and one or two others. White, they were white, you know. No colored people had cars, you know. And the doctor was one of them, and that was my first ride in an automobile.

TBW: That's something that's very interesting, because I couldn't remember my first ride in the automobile, because it was when they brought me home from the hospital. So, I think it's fascinating that you can remember.

JG: My first ride in the car was with the doctor that come to see somebody sick in our community and he came out in the car. And when he got ready to go back, well, he'd tell the kids that they could ride with him in the car and we'd get up in the car and ride and go open the gate.

TBW: Did you walk home after that?

JG: Oh, yeah, we walked back. It was half a mile, might have been a mile, I don't know. [laughs]

TBW: Was it worth it?

JG: Yeah, we enjoyed riding in the car. We got to ride in the car. Then we'd open the gate and walk back home. We liked to do that. We were children and that was the most pleasurable thing we had to do, riding in that car.

TBW: How many people, about, I know you can't probably know, but how many people lived in the community?

JG: Where I lived? Oh, we had a lot of folks in the community. Yeah, it was a thickly settled community with the blacks. There was a few whites in there, but not many. The major part of the people in that vicinity were black, at that time.

TBW: Why do you think that was? Why did so many people settle there?

JG: I don't know. But they got land, everybody, the blacks just bought land. I used to hear my father, some of them, before my time ever was, and his, I guess, bought the land in the woods for fifty cents an acre, but my father paid a dollar for his.

TBW: He came later, then.

JG: Yeah, he came later.

TBW: Was that an old settlement? Had people been living there a long time?

JG: Yeah, it was old, because my grandfather was a hundred and thirteen years old and he owned a farm.

TBW: So you knew your grandfather?

JG: Oh, yeah. My father's father. Lived to be a hundred and thirteen.

TBW: He must have been, he was...

JG: He owned a farm, and he had forty acres. And I think he was one of the ones that paid fifty cents an acre for his land. My father paid a dollar, and his sister paid a dollar. She had fifty acres. My father had four hundred and some acres, but he paid a dollar an acre. But all the land the people bought in those days, it was woods when they bought it.

TBW: So probably, some people would look at that land with all the woods on it and say, that's no good, that's not good land.

JG: I don't know what they thought about the land, but some of them didn't buy no land, because some of them were sharecroppers. My father had three sharecroppers on his place, but he cleared up, he bought his land and cleared it off. Cut the wood off of it and everything and cleared it up. Then he farmed on it.

TBW: Was your father's land next to your grandfather's land?

JG: No. They were far apart. My grandfather's land was, I guess, about two or three miles, I would say miles, from my father's land. And my auntie's land was far apart, too.

TBW: So it wasn't all together?

JG: No, it wasn't all close together.

TBW: So you got to go between these houses, though, to see your aunt and your grandfather. Did you visit them a lot?

JG: Oh, yeah. I didn't ever go visit my grandfather, but I did go visit my aunt. I didn't know anything about visiting my grandfather, but I did know my aunt, because my grandfather's wife passed away before my time. After she passed away, he lived, he was old and he lived first with my father and his daughter. He had two girls and two boys, and he lived first with one boy and then with his daughter. But the other girl and boy he didn't ever live with them, because one of them, one of his sons lived in a different county. He didn't want to be that far. And then his other daughter, she passed away, I don't know anything about her, she passed before I was born.

TBW: How old was your father when you were born?

JG: Well, he was fifty-seven years old when he passed away, and I was twelve years old, and you can take it from there.

TBW: So he was a little older when you were born?

JG: Oh, yes, he was an old settled man when I was born, I guess. He was fifty-seven when he passed away, and I was twelve. So you can take it from there, and count and see how old he was when I was born.

TBW: Your mother, was that your father's first wife.

JG: Oh, no, my father was married four times.

TBW: That's right, I remember that from our last conversation, but I couldn't remember which order.

JG: He was married four times, and had children by three of his wives. And one wife didn't have any children. He had three children by his first wife, and my mother had one child, and that was me. And then, his last wife had five children.

TBW: So all of the sudden, you had all these half brothers and sisters.

JG: I don't have any whole brothers or sisters. I was mama's only child.

TBW: That must have been a busy household.

JG: Oh, yeah. And I was eight years older than her oldest child, his last wife. I was eight years older than her oldest child.

TBW: Being that much older than your half brothers and sisters, did you have to help around the house a lot?

JG: I took care of those children. [laughs] I guess that's why the Lord didn't give me any children. I had already reared them.

TBW: So you did a lot of work around the house?

JG: I did everything. I took care of the children, just like they were my children. I was eight years older than the oldest of them. And the others were back, you know.

TBW: And were you going to school at the same time?

JG: Oh, I went to school. They had a little one-room school and I went to school.

TBW: And then came home and did the work around the house, take care of the kids.

JG: Oh, sure. Took care of the little children [end of side one] [beginning of side two]

TBW: While you're doing lots of things, taking care of the kids and working around the house, there's something I'm very curious about, is what would you say is the biggest difference between how people take care of their homes today and how the things you had to do to say, clean the house. Vacuum cleaners would be one example. Did you have a vacuum cleaner?

JG: Oh, didn't know what carpet was. I didn't know what linoleum was. We had wood floors.

TBW: And now everybody wants those.

JG: In those days, we didn't have no linoleum on the floors, no kind of carpets. Just had wood floors. We would scrub them, they would be white and you could eat off them.

TBW: Scrub them? What would you use to clean them with?

JG: Clean them with a mop and get down on your knees with a rag and wash them.

TBW: That's a lot of work. Did you use some kind of soap?

JG: Oh, yeah, we used soap. We had lye soap.

TBW: Lye soap. Did you make that?

JG: Yes.

TBW: How do you do that? How do you make lye soap?

JG: Well, you can make lye soap out of ashes that you burn in a wood stove. They take the ashes and put them in a sack. And then boil it and it will come out pure lye. And then you take grease, just like you save your grease where you have fry your meat and you save that in a bucket. Then you just put the lye and the grease together and it makes the soap.

TBW: What else did you use that for, other than cleaning house?

JG: We used it for everything. We washed clothes with it, scrubbed and everything. And bathed. We bathed with that soap.

TBW: That seems so, I just can't imagine anything other than going to the store, you go in, grab it off the shelf and go. It seems like in some ways life is a lot easier than a long time ago.

JG: Yeah, you can make—we used to make hominy. Do you know anything about lye hominy?

TBW: No, I don't know how it's made, I know what it is, I like it a whole lot.

JG: You like it when you buy it off the shelves now.

TBW: That's right.

JG: Oh, we made it by the five gallons, hominy.

TBW: How did you do it?

JG: I'll tell you the way we would make hominy. We had a fireplace, and we would take the ashes out of the fireplace and put them in a flour sack and tie it up. And then we'd shell a bushel of corn and

put it in a wash pot and put that flour sack with those ashes in there with the corn. And, of course, boil it and we'd let the corn cook and in a course of time you'd see that husk come off and when the husk come off the hominy, we'd take the sack out and drain that water off, put some clear water on it and take our hands and wash it and it would be just pretty and white. [laughs] And it's just like this you buy, wouldn't be a bit of difference to it. And we had a crock and we'd put the hominy in the crock and just take a piece of cloth and cover it up, and it didn't spoil.

TBW: How long did that last? How often did you have to make hominy?

JG: Until we'd eat it up. We'd have five gallon crock, and you took it, sliced some bacon and fried the bacon, put some of that hominy in the bacon and it was the best stuff you ever ate.

TBW: Sounds good. Did you also raise meat for the family to eat?

JG: Oh, yeah. We had hogs, I remember. I didn't know how many hogs we had, they all grew wild. They didn't run wild all the time, because see, they made crops, they harvested potatoes and gardens. They'd keep them up, but after they harvested the crops, they'd turn the hogs out. And the hogs would just, you know—but the ones they were going to kill for meat, they'd always keep them up in a pen and fatten them up, then they would kill those hogs. They had their own lard and sausage and things like that.

TBW: Did you help with that whole process?

JG: No, I didn't help with it. I was, my father had hired hands and hired people to do that, I didn't help.

TBW: That's probably very heavy work.

JG: Yeah, it was heavy work.

TBW: And you had lots of mules, you said.

JG: Yeah, he had eight mules.

TBW: And those were just for work? Did you also ride them anywhere?

JG: No, he used them to work the farm. And each sharecropper had a mule that they would work with, and he had his own mules so he'd have his own crop.

TBW: Did you have horses, too?

JG: Yeah.

TBW: Did you use the horses for transportation?

JG: Oh, we used the horses for just riding and going around, we'd use horses.

TBW: Did you have chickens or anything like that?

JG: Oh, we had a lot chickens. Turkeys, too. We had chickens and turkeys. Some people had ducks. My auntie always had ducks and geese, was what we called ducks. Or guineas. But we didn't have any guineas, but she did, she had guineas and ducks. But we had chickens and turkeys.

TBW: So generally, you'd keep those around for eggs and to eat them. Did you sell them, too?

JG: No, we didn't sell them. We just had plenty to eat. I don't remember, I guess they could have sold them, but I don't remember them selling any eggs. We would give our neighbors eggs, you know to some of the poor ones. Because we were the better livers.

TBW: It sure sounds like it, like you had a comfortable life.

Mamie Cavil: Did you tell her how people used to keep eggs by burying them or putting them in a hole to keep them cool under the house.

JG: Eggs?

MC: Yes.

JG: We always put them in cotton seed.

TBW: You put them in cotton seed to keep them from spoiling?

JG: Yeah, just like you take a wash to them, and put some cotton seed down in there, then put eggs in there, then another layer of cotton seed and put eggs on top of that. That would keep them from

spoiling real quick. If you had a lot of eggs. Now you'd have to have a lot of eggs to mess with them like that, but I've seen the times that we would put a few like that.

TBW: And where were they kept? In the house, or somewhere else?

JG: Yeah, just put them back in some parts of the house.

TBW: How big was the house that you grew up in?

JG: Oh, we had a big house. We had two bedrooms on each side, we had a dining room and a kitchen, and then we had a back porch, and we had a room at the end of the back porch. And we had a hall, just like we had a hall going down here, we had a bedroom on this side of the hall and a bedroom on that side of the hall. And at the end of the hall, we had a dining room and then at the end of the dining room, we had a kitchen. And then going out of the dining room, we had a back porch, and on the end of it, we had a room.

TBW: Is that where somebody slept?

JG: My brothers slept there, that was called the boys' room.

TBW: I was thinking of the eggs, what you used to do with them. How did you keep meat from spoiling?

JG: Salted down. Just killed it, then put a lot of salt on it, and let it stay so long in the salt, and then take it up and wash the salt off, hang it up and smoke it.

TBW: Just put salt on it. You don't soak it in water or anything?

JG: When you first kill it, you take the salt and salt it down and let it stay so many days. And after it's stayed so many days, you take it out of that salt and shake the salt off of it, and wash the salt off. Then you hang it up and smoke it. Build a fire wherever you had it, and smoke it. The smoke would dry it, and it wouldn't get nothing to bother it.

TBW: Did you do that outside or in a smokehouse?

JG: No, we had a smokehouse.

TBW: And it was a separate building.

JG: Yes, separate building. That's a house where we kept things, like peas and plow tools and anything you want to put in this house, go to the smokehouse.

TBW: So it was not just a little building, it was kind of a bigger place...

MC: It was a storage place, you could keep dried peas...

TBW: You could use it for all kinds of things, that's a good idea. Now what did you use to create the smoke, to smoke the meat?

JG: Oh, wood chips. We lived in the country and had burned wood, and of course, when you cut your wood, saw up your wood, you'd have all kinds of chips. We would take those chips and make a fire. And when you started the fire, you'd put the fire out and let it kind of smother and create smoke.

TBW: And how did that meat taste? Was it really salty?

JG: Oh, no, it wasn't salty. It was good.

MC: And if it was too salty when you got ready to cook it, you would soak in water to soak out some of the salt.

JG: Yeah, if it would be salty, you just soak it in water, let it come to boil, pull that water off and then fry it.

TBW: So it wasn't too salty. Was it better than what they sell in the store? Do you like it better than what's in the store.

JG: Well, I would like it better. [laughs] And I would certainly like the sausage they made.

TBW: Do you learn how to do all of that stuff, make sausages and things like that? Or was that left to the people who did that.

JG: Oh, I was there, just like a kid, but I didn't have anything to do with it, the grown folk would do that. But I was a child.

MC: When you grew up and got married, you did it.

JG: Oh, yeah, after I was married I did it. I did my own stuff like that. But when I was a kid, my father always provided, he was a good provider.

TBW: Let's talk about school a little bit. When did you graduate from high school? I'm not sure what the structure of the schools were.

JG: No, I didn't graduate from high school. I went to first school—well, in fact, I didn't go any further than the seventh or eighth grade. In a one-teacher school. We didn't have but one teacher out there in those days.

TBW: How many different teachers did you have when you were growing up?

JG: We had two or three. One would keep it two or three years, and somebody else would come by and keep it two or three. We didn't have the same teacher all the time. But I was about six years old when I went to school the first time. And the teacher boarded with my father and rode a horse to school and I used to ride behind him on the horse.

TBW: Really? How far was this school from your house?

JG: It was about two and a half miles or three. But we didn't get a ride—only that teacher—the other teachers, we had to walk, because that same teacher didn't teach the school, you know, not too long.

TBW: So you did have to walk some years.

JG: Oh, I used to walk two, at the [unintelligible] was two miles and half to school. And then we had to go across a pond. And when we got to the pond, we'd pull off our shoes and wade across the pond, and when we got across the pond, we'd put the shoes and stockings back on.

TBW: What happened in the winter time? That must have been cold.

JG: Well, we did it in the winter. It would be cold, but we'd pull off our shoes and stockings and go through. It wasn't no more than knee deep, probably, may not have been that deep. Once we got across the pond, we'd put our shoes and stockings back on go on to school.

TBW: How far after the pond was the school?

JG: Oh, the pond was about middle way from home to school.

TBW: Sounds like fun.

JG: We wouldn't miss a day. Only time we would miss a day out of school was in the spring time when we had to stop to work, sometimes, in planting corn. My father would always say that I had a growing hand, and he'd stop me a day or two out of school to drop corn. [laughs]

TBW: And how did you do that? How did that go?

JG: Oh, you just like, they'd open the furrow and you'd take the corn in the bucket and just drop it, drop it, drop it. And he'd always stop me out of school, I'd be so mad. When I tell you how he said I had a growing hand, he'd always give me some seed when we'd plant the garden. And I'll always have me a garden in the fence corner, and my garden would be bigger, larger than their gardens. [laughs] And he said I had a growing hand. I don't know. But later down in the years as I got older, he had a planter, he bought a planter, I don't know whether you know what a planter is.

TBW: I'm not sure what it looks like.

JG: It's a instrument has something on top of it like a bucket, and it rolls over and over and it will drop that corn.

MC: At set distances.

TBW: So it would like, roll down these long rows and drop it right in the middle.

MC: Right. And it was pulled by a horse or mule. In later years, tractors.

JG: But he didn't have that planter, at first.

TBW: You were the only planter he had.

JG: Well, there were two brothers, but he didn't ever stop them. Well, he didn't have but one with him. My auntie had the other boy, he gave him to her when his wife passed away, his second wife. He gave one of the little boys to my auntie, and he kept the other one. But he never did make him do too much, and he was lazy.

TBW: So it sounds like you liked to go to school a lot, that you loved school.

JG: Oh, I loved school.

TBW: What was it like, did you have a schedule every day? Did you do reading first, math second, like that? Or what was a school day like?

JG: Our teachers always had it like that. Just in the morning, probably, she'd have arithmetic, and after arithmetic she'd have reading and right after dinner she'd have geography, and then English. She had a regular routine, like you'd have to do.

TBW: You had to take tests and everything?

JG: Not like they do now, not the kind of tests they take now.

TBW: What kind of—how did she know if you were learning, what would she have you do?

JG: Well, we had report cards.

MC: No, she made her own tests, the teacher. When she said not tests like today's tests she means tests like the TAAS and all these. The teachers made their own tests at that time.

TBW: Did you have to do them on the board, or did you do them on your paper?

JG: No, we did them on paper, sometimes.

TBW: And you did well, I'm sure.

JG: I thought I did. [laughs]

TBW: How were your report cards, what kinds of grades did you get?

JG: I would get As and Bs, I was always smart in school. I'm not bragging on myself, but I wanted to learn. I just loved school all my life.

TBW: Now once you got out of school, what did you do? You said you went to that school until you were about in the seventh or eighth grade? What happened after that?

JG: I finished the seventh grade. After that, my father passed away and he belonged to a lodge. He had a policy, and it was divided in three parts. My brothers, my two brothers and myself. Well, he

appointed, on his deathbed, he had an administrator to take my part and keep it until I got able to go to college. And when I was in the seventh grade, I went to Prairie View. Now, Prairie View, at that time, it was a Normal School, that would accept children that had not finished high school. I went straight over there. And after I was over there, this administrator paid my tuition. But that tuition didn't last but a half a year, because it wasn't enough. So I was going to have to come home because I didn't have any money to finish the rest of the year. And I had a cousin that saw me going to the laundry to get my clothes out, and he was working for this man who run the laundry. He asked me, "Where are you going?" I told him I was going to the laundry to get my clothes because I had to go home because my money had played out. And he said, "You wait a minute, I'm going to see Mister Ewell (spelling?), that was the man's name that run the laundry and see if he'll let you have a job to finish out the year." And so he did, and the laundry man called the office, to see if I had made good grades. He asked me, he said, "You ever work in a laundry?" He was a very stern man, and we called him mean, because he was so stern, you know. "You ever work in the laundry?" And I said, "No, I haven't, but I can learn if somebody teaches me." "Well," he said, "you have good grades. You go over there and let those girls teach you how to work on that extractor." And I went one day and they said tomorrow come back here and let them teach you how to iron a shirt. And we had flat irons. [laughs]

TBW: How did you heat those flat irons?

JG: Oh, they had a little gas thing that you put them on, and heat them.

TBW: They must have been heavy, too.

JG: Oh, yes. And then from one of the operations to the other until I went around the laundry and learned how to do all the operations. And when I learned how to do all the operations—in fact, he paid me while I was learning. And then I finished the year out working in the laundry. And I got through high school, you could go through high school down there in one year.

TBW: So your first year there was to finish high school.

JG: And then the next year, you could be prepared to get into the college department.

TBW: Now, I didn't understand one thing when you were talking about the laundry. What's an extractor?

JG: Oh, it was a, you know, it was old-time everything. Wasn't no modern laundry like they have now.

MC: No, what did you do with the extractor, put the clothes in it?

JG: Oh, yeah, the extractor washed the clothes. Like a washing machine.

TBW: Was it like those ones with the big tubs and rollers on top?

JG: Yeah, it had a big roller, long as, across this room. Not quite, but almost. You'd put the clothes in there, and it turned over and over like a washing machine. That's an extractor. It wasn't a thing where you washed the clothes, and then you would take them out of there, and they had places where you'd hang them. And had the manger (spelling) where you run your sheets and pillow cases and towels.

TBW: Did you iron everything, almost everything? Or just the shirts?

JG: You didn't iron nothing. The manger would do the sheets.

MC: The manger, this is what you're ironing on in a laundry, even now. It's a roller that irons and you put clothes in it and it runs it through. One person stands on this side and runs them through and when they come out on the other side, they're dry, because this roller...so when they come out, you're ready to fold them. This is how you do this part of the job.

JG: And the pillow cases and towels, the same way, they always go through the manger. And other clothes, they'd have places around there to hang them up to dry.

TBW: It must have been really hot, with all that steam and those irons.

JG: It was hot. Man says, there's just one place hotter than that, and that's hell. [laughs] That laundry, there wasn't one place hotter than that laundry and that was hell. I never been to hell, but I've been to that laundry.

TBW: So you worked there the rest of the school year. Did you go back when you—now did you go home during the summer?

JG: Yes, I come home during the summer. And my step-mother was supposed to send me back to school. And, of course, she didn't send me back. Well, my uncle hadn't ever seen me, and wrote her a letter asking her to let me come to see him. And she did. Well, he sent my fare to come and see him. I wanted to see him. And he had three children that he had reared from his relatives, and neither one would go to college. They had finished high school, but they wouldn't go to college. And he said, "I'm so glad that you're here, I'm going to send you to college. You don't need to go back home. I'll get you a trunk of clothes and send you to college, because these three that I reared, they won't go." I wrote and asked her, could I stay and let him send me to college, and she said no, my step-mother. She said, no, she was going to send me to college, to come back home. Well, I obeyed everything she said. I didn't let him send me, I went on back home. And when I got back home, she told me she didn't have nothing to send me to college with, and wasn't going to send me to college. I was stuck there.

TBW: That must have been a great disappointment, to say the least.

JG: It was a great disappointment, and that's the only sassy word I ever gave her. I told her, "Well, I'm not going to stay here any longer, I'm going to marry." And she said I didn't have anybody to marry. I told her I did, and I did have somebody to marry, and I did. So that was my first marriage.

TBW: And how old were you?

JG: Nineteen. And I did everything, I never gave her a sassy word, I never stayed out of the house at night without her permission. But that was the ball game. So she wouldn't send me back to college, and I told her, "If you don't send me back to college, I'm going to marry." And I did marry.

TBW: Was that really the only way you could see to get out of the house, either college or get married?

JG: That was the only way that I could get out of the house, because I wasn't a person—I thought I didn't have anywhere to go, where was I going? [laughs]

TBW: That's a good question. Now, if you think about it, everybody just gets up and go.

JG: Yeah, there's plenty of places to go. Girls won't stay home, even with their own families now. But I stayed right there, I didn't stay out of that house one night, unless I asked her. And not even that, if I wanted to go across the street, over there to that house, I would ask her, may I go, and I was nineteen years old. If she said yes, I went. If she said no, I didn't go. [end of tape one] [beginning of tape two] Ninety years ago, eighty years ago, there was no Army for me to go to.

TBW: So you got married.

JG: That was my first marriage.

TBW: When you got married, was it everything you expected?

JG: Oh, yes, we lived a happy life. We were poor, but you know, I like saying that money isn't everything. Love and care is one thing, and that's what I had, I had a nice husband. Believe it or not, his family is here in San Antonio, part of them are. And they cherish me just like I was living with my husband. Don't they Mamie? They cherish me just like I was living with their uncle.

TBW: After so many years. That's wonderful.

JG: They give me gifts. I've got an afghan in there right now, that his sister's daughter made here just a few months ago, brought it here and gave it to me. They just cherish me. And I have three relatives here, I have two men and a lady. And they just cherish me like I'm living with their uncle, living with their brother.

TBW: When you were married, did you continue college at that point, or what did you do at that point?

JG: When I was married? Well, when we married, we farmed, the first year we were married, we farmed as sharecroppers with his father. His father had a lot of land at that time and we were sharecroppers with him, but we didn't make nothing. And what little we made, we had to give him half of it, and the other half, it didn't pay for the little things we had bought on the credit. We bought a bed and a cooking stove and what else did we buy? Two chairs or something like that and a cook pot. We didn't make enough to pay.

TBW: But you needed these things to set up your house, though. You had to have them.

JG: Honey, we bought what we had to have and that was a bed and a cooking stove and some pots and pans and two or three things, but still, when we got our little half, at the prices of things, it didn't pay. So he went on a cotton pick.

TBW: Your husband did?

JG: Yeah, we went on a cotton pick and left me there. And when he got on a cotton pick, he told me, and his mother was separated from his father and she lived in San Angelo. And when he went on the cotton pick, he told me, "It's nice out here and we can make us some money picking cotton. You leave everything there in the house, and put our bedclothes in a trunk and your clothes, and come out here where I am." And I did. [laughs]

TBW: So you went out and you were working with him.

JG: I stayed out there one week, and it turned cold, freezing cold. And his mother told him to bring me to San Angelo, it was too cold for me to be out there. And she took me in and treated me just like I was her daughter.

TBW: Now when you were there, the short time you were there, were you helping him work?

JG: It was too cold. It was so cold we couldn't work. It was too cold to pick cotton, and that's what we were there to do. It was so cold, couldn't pick no cotton. And she told him, "It's too cold for her to stay out there, bring her over here to my house." And that was in San Angelo. So he carried me over

there, and when we got over there, I never did think about going back, and he didn't either. And we both stayed in San Angelo, for the present time. And of course, he got a job, whatever he could get to do.

TBW: So he did all kinds of things, whatever came up. What were you doing at the time?

JG: Well, I would do the same thing. The first job I had—it's in that book if you read it.

TBW: I did, I don't remember, it's been a while since I've read it. Can you tell me about it?

JG: Yes, but do you remember I was working for a sporting woman and she had a child and she had hired me to take care of the child.

TBW: How was that, did you enjoy that?

JG: I didn't know nothing about what was going on, I was from the country and I didn't know no more than you know about it. But when I went to the house, she told me, "Now, you don't have to do nothing but stay in here and take care of this baby." She had a little girl, about a toddler, about two and a half years old. She said, "Lunch time, we will have lunch, but you stay here and play with her." But what she was doing, I didn't know.

TBW: Do you want me to answer the door? [pause in tape] I said I want to make sure I understand what you're telling me here, you said she was a sporting woman?

JG: You know, a woman, who—a prostitute. [laughs]

TBW: I just wanted to make sure I had that straight. That's not someone who rides around on horse with a gun, I just wanted to make sure I had that we had that straight.

JG: She was. But I didn't know nothing about what was going on. She be there all the time, but I didn't know nothing, I just didn't know. I just went every day, and she paid me five dollars a week.

TBW: Was that pretty good money at that point?

JG: That was big money. [laughs]

TBW: That didn't make you wonder what was going on?

JG: No, I didn't...

TBW: She didn't have a husband or anything?

JG: I didn't ever see no husband, I saw nothing but her and that baby.

TBW: You didn't see any men or anything?

JG: No. I didn't see nothing. She had a house, and I was just like in the back bedroom, and that's where me and this girl would stay all the time. Just like in that back bedroom, where you couldn't see anyone come in the front, I wouldn't see them, and didn't know nothing.

TBW: How would you know?

JG: I didn't see nothing, you know, just being a girl from home, I didn't know anything about anything like that.

TBW: Did you see any of the rest of the house other than the little area where you worked?

JG: Oh, it was a splendid residence. It was a residential section, but still, I didn't know anything more than you know right now.

TBW: No, but did you see the inside of her house, except for her room?

JG: Oh, yes. I could go inside, but I wouldn't ever see nothing. It was just a furnished house.

TBW: Was it nice?

JG: Yes, it was nice, liveable, you know. I would say that it was nice.

TBW: So it wasn't like a mansion or a beautiful house.

JG: No, it wasn't no mansion, it was just a real nice house, everything she had, it was nice stuff. But I didn't know what was what. I just thought it was a woman with a nice house, what she did, I didn't know.

TBW: When did you find out? Or how did you find out? Or did you while you were working there?

JG: I didn't never find out until after I quit, after my husband got a job and I quit. My mother-in-law told me that's what it was.

TBW: What did you say?

JG: I didn't say nothing, because I didn't know. And she knew I didn't know, so she just never told me. I didn't know and she didn't tell me, and that was that. And so when my husband got a job, he got a job working on a ranch and when he got a job working on the ranch, well, the man wanted a man and his wife working on the ranch. Well, he had a one-room shack for the help to stay in. And then, the man, fed the cattle, he went with them, a bunch of them, cowboys and all that, to take care of the cattle, and he went with them to herd and feed the cattle. Well, now I worked at the house like this, help the lady cook and iron and wash and you know, all like that. Well, it was forty-five miles in the county, on that ranch. And this lady had a Ford car. She had a T-model Ford car and she would go and see her brother almost every day. And she would leave me there at her house like this. And I was afraid of them cowboys. And I told my husband I wasn't going to stay out there with those cowboys. We stayed out there and made one pay day and that was one month. That was that. Then we went back to San Angelo to his mama's house, because I couldn't sleep at night, I was scared to death.

[laughs]

TBW: You were afraid they were going to come into the house?

JG: Yes, but they didn't bother you, they didn't do nothing to you in the world. And I cried every time she would leave to go to her brother's house, I would start crying.

TBW: Because you were lonely?

JG: No, I was crying because I was afraid, you see. I had never been around nobody like that, but they didn't bother you, they didn't say one word to you, and they would ask me, "Why are you going to cry? We are men just like the other people, we're not bothering you, why would you cry?" You know, if you're afraid, you're afraid. And so I would cry. Well, after we went back, I wouldn't stay out there, we stayed one month, made one payday and we went back to San Angelo. [laughs] We went back to San Angelo, and when we went back to San Angelo, he was always smart and was a good

cook, my husband was. And so he found in the paper where he had another job, and this was at Fort Stockton, and they wanted a chef cook at a hotel. He answered that ad and they hired him. And he went out there and he stayed out there about two months, at this hotel, and I stayed in San Angelo with his mother.

TBW: You must have missed him.

JG: Yeah, I did, but his mother was nice to me. She would treat me just like I was her daughter. I stayed right there with her, and he stayed out there about two months, and then he sent for me to come to Fort Stockton, where he was working. And you know, he was fair and had straight hair and everything, and they never did know what nationality he was. And they'd always say, "Chef, what nationality are you?" And he'd say, "I'm a man." And he never told them what nationality he was. When I went out there, he had me dying laughing, he said, "They know who chef is now." Because they could look at me and know I was a negro, you know, and they said, "Chef done give the play away, now."

TBW: What year was this, were you about twenty at the time?

JG: I was about twenty-one or twenty-two.

TBW: So this is about nineteen fifteen or so?

JG: It's in that thing that I gave you to read.

TBW: I don't have it with me. Do you think they would have hired him had they known?

JG: Oh, yeah. He still worked. He still worked there, we worked there two years.

TBW: Did you like it there?

JG: Oh, yeah, I loved it there, but let me tell you the story about that. I could cook, and when I took the, I run the pies for them at the hotel. So when a doctor came in and had the pie, he said, "Oh, this is the best pie. Who cooked this pie?" "My wife." He said, "Where is your wife?" And he came in there and saw me. He said, "Well, I've got a sanitarium," you know a sanitarium, a miniature hospital, but in those days they called them sanitariums. "I would like to have a cook up there, and if she made

these pies.” He said, “Well, if she wants to go out there and cook, she can.” And he saw me and asked me would I come out there to cook at this hospital. And said he had a place for me to stay and everything. My husband told the people at the hotel, “I’m going out there to stay with my wife, because she can’t go across town. I’m going to stay there because I can go to work in the morning and she can’t go to work in the morning.” So he moved out of the hotel, they had a furnished room for him, so he moved out of the hotel and come up to the hospital where I was and stayed with me. And we worked there for about two years. And that’s where I got the first money to go back to school. I saved my money working at that hotel. I didn’t have to buy nothing, and he bought all my clothes. We took his money and we spent it, and I saved my money and went back to college and got my first certificate.

TBW: How many patients were at that hospital you were cooking for? How many people did you cook for every day?

JG: Well, they were equipped to accommodate just about eight or twelve, at most. Very small place. And so they, they were very nice. They only had two nurses and they had two doctors. That was a very small place. Fort Stockton, at that time, was a very small little stop in the road. So when they had these two nurses, they tried to get me to be a nurse, but I didn’t want to be no nurse.

TBW: Why not?

JG: Well, I tell you the reason I didn’t want to—and when they found out I had been to some college, they’d go to town shopping and leave me with the patients. They wouldn’t both go, but one would go. “Dear, you take care of my patients while I’m gone.” And I could read directions if they had to have medicine, and you know, take care of them. And I would. And then they tried to get me to be a nurse. And so I was liking it just fine, until I had to help them with the bedpans. [laughs] When I got to the place one time, one of them had run over and I had to empty that bed pan and honey, I was through with nursing. [laughs] I told them I didn’t want to be no nurse. So they said, “When you go back to school, you can be a school teacher.” So they encouraged me to go back to school. I was just

encouraged by both of those nurses, to go back to school, but both of them wanted me to be a nurse, and I wouldn't be no nurse, I didn't like it. I went back to school this time, I had money enough to pay all my tuition.

TBW: How nice. Didn't have to work in the laundry no more.

JG: Didn't have to work in the laundry any more, and I had all the clothes on me and I had all the everything I needed, I had. Because I had saved my money and my husband had given me money. And when I went back to school and was able to get a certificate to teach, well, I came out and got a school the first year.

TBW: Now when you went to Fort Stockton and back, how did you get there? Did you take the train?

JG: Oh, we went on the train. That's the only way you get out there.

TBW: You came back to college, and you had everything you needed. Your husband was obviously happy about you going to college, he wanted you to?

JG: Oh, yes, he encouraged it.

TBW: Was that unusual for that time? For men to say, "I want my wife to go to college."

JG: Yeah. He wanted me and he bought me everything, all my clothes and everything for me to go back. He wanted me to go back.

TBW: So how long did you stay that time?

JG: Oh, I just stayed one year. At the end of that year, I was able to get a certificate to teach, it was when they were issuing second-grade certificates. [laughs] And, of course, I felt like he had helped me get a certificate, I felt like I ought to come out and teach. We cooperated. We worked together. And the first year that I was out of college and going to school, he came down with tuberculosis and passed.

TBW: How did that make you feel?

JG: Oh, I was really hurt, because I was really in love with him. Because he was nice.

TBW: And he sounds like he was very progressive for that time.

JG: Yeah, he was very, very nice and when I was teaching, I was teaching and going to take care of him while I was teaching. But his mother wouldn't let me. She said, "You can't teach school and take care of a sick man. You let him stay here with me, and I'll take care of him and you go ahead on and teach." But every month, I would send her so much money out of my teaching.

TBW: So you were separated from him at this time.

JG: Yeah, I was in Milam County and he was in San Angelo.

TBW: That must have made it even worse.

JG: It was, because you see, you know San Angelo, well, you know where Milam County is. That's where I was. I taught school and then he was with his mother in San Angelo.

TBW: How often were you able to see him during that time.

JG: Oh, I didn't seem him, I'd go holidays. To San Angelo to see him. You know, like they have school holidays, that's when I'd go see him.

TBW: So he must have been very young when he passed.

JG: Oh, he was young. He was in his twenties, and I was in my twenties.

TBW: Another thing I was thinking about, was you were teaching school after you got married. Was that unusual? I thought most places didn't want married women teaching school.

JG: Yeah, that was unusual. It was unusual.

TBW: How did you get that job? They needed someone badly, or...

JG: I'll tell you how I got that job. When I made a certificate, this man was principal in the little town where we lived, where I grew up, in Cameron. Of course, I grew up on the farm. And he was a principal at this town, and so after I made my certificate, I was in town and saw this man, and I said, "Mister Huff (spelling?) I have a certificate to teach now, and if you hear of a job, will you please let me know?" He said, "By the way, you got a job." I said, "I have a job?" And he said, "Yeah. My

wife is pregnant,” and you know, they don’t let pregnant women teach school, they used to didn’t let, there was once upon a time when they didn’t let no pregnant women teach no school. Said, “My wife is pregnant, she can’t teach where she’s teaching, so I’ll just carry you down there and you can get the job.” I got it just that easy. And he carried me down there where his wife was teaching school and told the trustee that his wife was pregnant and she wouldn’t be able to teach, and they just hired me, right off.

TBW: Sounds like the easiest job search in the history of the world.

JG: Yeah, it was, that’s all the way I had, I didn’t have no more troubles. I was just wondering what I would do, teachers were scarce. There wasn’t many teachers in those days.

TBW: Especially in the outlying areas, not the cities.

JG: Wasn’t many anywhere, really.

MC: But in Texas, it has never been as hard for married women to get jobs as they had in other states. Now Kansas is one of those states that used to not hire married women at all.

TBW: Was that because there were more women to hire?

MC: That was just one of their rules. They didn’t feel that women who were married had time to teach school. But Texas, for many years, has—not pregnant, but if you were married, that was alright.

JG: But they used to didn’t hire pregnant women anywhere.

TBW: Oh, no. Much earlier, you didn’t go out in public that much.

JG: No, they didn’t go out public, they didn’t even go to church, when they were pregnant.

TBW: Because nobody’s supposed to see them. It’s like a sickness or an illness or something. How things have changed.

MC: Now they let the children go to school pregnant.

TBW: Yeah, everything’s changed so much. I’m wondering, are you getting ready for dinner, I don’t know how far you want to go today. I don’t want to stay too long. [end of tape]

